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THE

LAYMAN's ADDRESS

TO THE

CLERGY OF ENGLAND.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

BRITISH MUSEUM

1539

THE

LAYMAN's ADDRESS

TO THE

CLERGY OF ENGLAND;

HUMBLY SUBMITTED TO

THE PERUSAL OF EVERY GENTLEMAN IN THE KINGDOM.

BY

A FRIEND

TO THE

CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT.

BATH:

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M DCC XCVIII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE LAYMAN's ADDRESS TO THE CLERGY.

IN a country profeſſing a pure religion, and enjoying a ſyſtem of liberty more favourable to the ſubject than any other form of government known in the world, it appears, at firſt view, ſomewhat extraordinary, that ſuch numerous and ſerious complaints ſhould, for ſo many years, have abounded againſt the Clergy. The Engliſh Conſtitution is juſtly eſteemed, by ſurrounding nations, the moſt perfect model of human legiſlature; affording eaſe and protection to the ſubject, and authority and ſecurity to the

prince. Its civil and eccleſiaſtical laws are ſo blended, as to unite the advocates for either in a natural alliance for mutual ſelf-defence.

At the preſent moment, when the public mind is in a great meaſure divided on important political events, I retire to an obſcure corner, and addreſs myſelf to the Clergy of England. As a member of your communion, I claim this privilege. As a man who has your intereſt at heart, you will attend to me with patience. You ſhall find neither the ſentiment of diſappointed ambition, the venom of diſaffection, or the ſarcaſm of ill-nature. No. Theſe are chiefly the productions of a perſecuting ſpirit. My principle is to look with benignity on the religions of others, and with veneration on my own.

It is our peculiar happineſs to enjoy a religion equidiſtant from ſuperſtition and profaneneſs. Our government, whilſt it encourages one, tolerates all religions. The people of England have been long ſenſible of their happy ſituation, and a conſequent jealouſy has attended every effort for innovation.—

But

But every thing human tends to corruption. Without the manuring hand of the ſkilful gardener, the moſt vigorous plant decays; and again, without his vigilant aid, the wild luxuriancy of its branches haſtens its own ruin. So, in the government of kingdoms. The legiſlator looks with paternal affection on the various orders of ſociety, and, where he cannot improve, as far as the complexion of the times will admit, ſtudies to preſerve the original beauty.

From the mild and benevolent ſpirit of the Britiſh Conſtitution, a more than common attention is requiſite in this kingdom. Nothing vindictive, nothing arbitrary, is impoſed by our laws. Nay, when a caſe can poſſibly admit it, inſtead of compelling the ſubject by an abſolute decree, they repoſe a diſcretionary power in a ſuperior, or, perhaps, in an equal ſubject. Thus circumſtanced, we appear more expoſed to the corruption which is brought on by time, than the inhabitants of a deſpotic empire; and, conſequently, more frequently require refreſhing aid.

The Church of England, as well for the elegant ſimplicity of its fabric, as for the purity of its doctrines, claims the precedency of all the reformed churches. Early did it liberate itſelf from the tyranny of Rome.* From the capricious Henry it received its freedom. Neither the narrow bigotry of James, nor the unrelenting furiouſneſs of Mary, have been able to reſtore our ſervile dependence. Their unamiable efforts have left us in the enjoyment of the greateſt of human bleſſings—civil and religious liberty.

Our eſtabliſhed religion is diveſted of ſuperſtition, and our prieſthood of auſterity. Whilſt the prieſt of Rome, ſecluded from ſociety, affects a more elevated ſanctity, the prieſt of England enjoys a happy intercourſe with his fellow-citizens, and demonſtrates to the world that the influence of example, and the regular diſcharge of the duties of active life, operate more powerfully in enforcing the precepts of religion, than all the gaudy tinſel

* Anno 1534.

of

of enthuſiaſm, or the empty pageantry of cloiſtered ignorance. No longer are the ſcanty portions of knowledge confined to the clergy, but religion has diffuſed her bleſſings through all ranks of ſociety.

Againſt a prieſthood of ſuch a deſcription it may juſtly be aſked, What is there to be objected?—The charge of Non-Reſidence is too general, and totally indefenſible. The Clergy themſelves, as far as I have had an opportunity of procuring information, have never attempted to juſtify this part of their conduct. The moſt ſpecious defence which has been ſet up is, that they have reſident curates: happy were this a fact. But though this anſwer may hold good in relation to town benefices, and, perhaps, to one out of five of country pariſhes, yet it is too viſible, too melancholy a truth, that the far greater number of the pariſhes in which there are not reſident incumbents, do not enjoy the advantage of reſident curates. To higher authority does it appertain to enlarge on the unpleaſant conſequences of relinquiſhing the

total

total care of a parish to a curate—to a curate, who, to obtain even a shabby income, must serve two or three parishes; who, if his rector or his diocesan deprive him of this opportunity, as far as relates to his worldly situation, is in a truly deplorable case.

In the diocese in which I have resided for some years, I do not know a single curate who has sufficient to live on as a gentleman, let him work never so hard. A melancholy truth this!

But, it will perhaps be said by the parsimonious incumbent, the author of these pages is an inhabitant of North-Wales. What if I were? On small livings, *more especially*, (except under very particular circumstances) no curate should be allowed to be employed, and for the obvious reason that the living will not support him. But, kind sir, believe me, this is not the case. I reside in as fertile a county as any in the kingdom. If you find yourself partial to good bread, which no doubt you do; if to the best of cider, to good malt, and to good hops, I never met with

with a county which I could recommend to you in preference to this; to ſay nothing of our oxen, and wool, the latter of which vies with the produce of Spain. You will (ſhould you ever viſit this county) hear your brother rectors boaſting that their livings produce four, ſix, and twelve hundreds a year. But ſtill, the ſcanty pittance of the curate enables a common mechanic to look down on him with contempt; for vulgar minds reſpect not the intrinſic, but ſterling value.* That precept may have its full weight, it is neceſſary that we ſhould approve the character by whom it is enforced. But, unfortunately, poverty produces no ſuch effect.

It is my unalterable opinion, that no incumbent ſhould be permitted to reſide any where but on his living, except for *very urgent reaſons*; and even here, no longer than ſuch reaſons continue to operate. Nor will I heſitate to affirm that the Biſhop who connives

* By the one, I would be underſtood to mean mental qualifications; by the other, the goods of fortune.

at

at non-reſidence *does not fulfil his obligations to religion and to ſociety.**

But this laſt obſervation leads me involuntarily to another unpleaſant reflection. The Biſhop himſelf has frequently calls of various kinds. I have known, and may truly add, I ſtill know a Biſhop a Head of a College. A little conſideration will tell us, that the duties of theſe offices are totally incompatible; I do not know two more intereſting and ſolemn engagements. Each (to be conſcientiouſly

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* "I am well aware," ſays the Biſhop of Norwich, in his Charge to his Clergy, "that many non-reſidents are conſcien-"tiouſly engaged, in various ways, in promoting the general "cauſe of chriſtianity; and are, perhaps, doing better ſervice, "than if they confined themſelves to the ordinary labours of the "miniſtry in a country pariſh."

How they can be doing more ſervice than in confining themſelves to their pariſhes, (with due ſubmiſſion) I am at a loſs to aſcertain, unleſs it be in literary purſuits; but theſe inſtances are ſo very rare, as ſcarcely to merit particular notice. If a clergyman with a moderate benefice has a large family, he ſhould be allowed, for a few years, to reſide in ſome convenient town for the education of ſuch a family; when this is accompliſhed, he ſhould return. But ſtill his pariſh muſt not be reſigned *wholly* to the curate; a public grievance muſt not be permitted to reſult from private accommodation.

diſcharged)

diſcharged) requires exertion, and *conſtant* reſidence. Some biſhoprics, it is true, are inſufficient for the ſupport of the dioceſan. Where this happens, a ſinecure is a comfortable, and the proper addition; but two ſuch ſerious active engagements as we have juſt conſidered, in conjunction, operate moſt powerfully againſt the intereſts of the church. A mitred pluraliſt is a fatal example. Pardon me, ye venerable bench. From the bottom of my heart I venerate your offices, and reſpect your perſonal characters. My feelings, however, will not permit me to paſs by another cauſe for complaint.

At a reſpectable age a worthy clergyman is entruſted with the care of a dioceſe. It may happen, and generally does happen in the ordinary courſe of things, that he is tranſlated to a more wealthy ſee. From this expectation, he may not be inclined to acquaint himſelf with the peculiar ſituation of his preſent dioceſe. It is to this I attribute the ruinous ſtate of the churches and palaces of the poorer biſhoprics. To this, in ſome meaſure,

meaſure, I attribute the poverty of the inferior clergy, the non-reſidence of the more wealthy, and the conſequent inattention to the diſcharge of parochial duty. If a tranſlation be at all neceſſary, it can only be to the two Archbiſhoprics, and to the Biſhoprics of London and Durham. The buſineſs attendant on theſe ſees may poſſibly require (I do not know that it does) ſome degree of experience; if it do not, on no other account ſhould a tranſlation be permitted. This meaſure would very much tend to revive the ſinking cauſe of religion, and to reſtore the Clergy to that degree of eſtimation they for ſo many years enjoyed in the circle of ſociety.

If we deſcend a ſtep lower, the ſame mode of reaſoning will hold good. A dignitary of the church ſhould, under no circumſtances, be permitted to enjoy two ſtalls. The proviſion enjoyed by the clergy of England is truly handſome; worthy the liberality of ſo generous a people. If properly diſtributed, it would be next to an impoſſibility for a man of character to paſs through life without being

being rewarded for his merit. I would recommend it too, that no one who enjoys a ſtall, or any office or offices in a cathedral or collegiate church, of the annual value of an hundred pounds a year, ſhould hold two livings, if the one *bona fide** be of the real or improveable value of more than three hundred pounds a year; and that he ſhould not be permitted to exchange any living he may hold from the Chapter, for another from the ſame Chapter, unleſs under very particular circumſtances; for it may be remarked, that on no livings are the parſonage-houſes ſo much out of repair as on Chapter livings, and that for the following obvious reaſon:—

The junior canon or prebendary takes a living; he is aware that on a ſenior canon's or prebendary's deceaſe or promotion, a general exchange will take place. In conſe-

* The uſual mode of aſcertaining the value of livings, I am well aware, is from the ſum at which they are rated in the King's Books. But, in the preſent day, this mode of calculation, from the improvement of livings, would be vague and uncertain.

quence

quence of this, he does not conſider himſelf ſettled; of courſe he expends nothing on his parſonage or glebe. At all events, dilapidations to his ſucceſſor will be very trifling, when compared with the expences which would attend the putting the houſe into ſuch repair as would render it the decent abode of a clergyman's family. Thus he reaſons from one living to another; nor does he conſider himſelf ſettled, till, in the courſe of ſucceſſion, he is preſented to the beſt living in the gift of the Chapter; but at a period, when the infirmities of age render him diſinclined to make thoſe improvements, which, at a more early part of his life, both taſte and intereſt would have induced him to make.

I cannot, in this place, omit the mention of another circumſtance ſtill more important. From his continued reſidence in one pariſh, the inhabitants of that pariſh would become attached to their paſtor; this circumſtance alone would give weight to his doctrine. They, on the other hand, would appear more

natural

natural to him, from a conviction that he was to call them his own for life, than if he were allowed to conſider himſelf merely as a bird of paſſage.

If a clergyman do not hold a ſtall, or any office in a cathedral, ſtill let him not be preſented to any two livings, if the one, *bona fide*, be of the annual real or improveable value of £.450, or if the two amount to £.600. The ſame good effects would reſult.

The trifling value of many of our livings is a great objection to any plan which can be propoſed for the government of the Church. Let it be recommended to the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty, not to be ſo very tenacious of their fund. Let me not be miſunderſtood; I mean, let them not ſtart ſo many objections to the lands which are pointed out by the incumbents, as conducive to the end in view. This circumſtance alone has prevented many applications; for two per cent. (the intereſt allowed by the Governors) is too trifling a conſideration.

In every dioceſe there are many ſinecure livings. Let the revenue ariſing from theſe be depoſited in proper hands, for the augmentation of the ſmaller livings in each reſpective dioceſe. There are many religious worthy men in the church who would undertake this, without the payment of ſalaries to clerks, &c.*

Let the Univerſities be requeſted to pay particular attention that the clergy who hold fellowſhips ſhall vacate ſuch fellowſhips as early as poſſible, on being preſented to livings; and let them not be too liberal in aſcertaining the value of ſuch livings. Such a meaſure would be the means of providing annually for no inconſiderable number of the clergy.

By thoſe who are already more than amply provided for, any plan of this kind will be

* It may poſſibly be urged, that this meaſure may prove ſubverſive of the rights of private patronage. If the patron look more to his own intereſt than to that of the public, (and in many inſtances, ſuch a conduct is not only reaſonable but neceſſary) let the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty be enabled to purchaſe ſuch ſinecures.

totally

totally diſapproved; by others, who think ſome reformation neceſſary in the church, this plan may juſtly be conſidered haſty and undigeſted. In anſwer to the latter, happy ſhould I be would it give riſe to ſomething which may claim the attention of the public, and be approved by all parties. A ſtateſman who ſhould introduce a reformation in the church, would merit a grateful tribute from every friend to religion and his country. That government which provides for moſt, will be ſupported by moſt.

Little was it ſuſpected on that day on which the laws relative to the clergy were framed, that every idle excuſe would be deemed ſufficient for an incumbent to make for abſenting himſelf from his pariſh, and ſpending his abundant income in a diſtant part of the kingdom, while a curate is toiling for a pittance very inadequate to his ſupport. At preſent I will not enlarge on this ſubject. I will not exhauſt your patience by pointing out the inconveniences reſulting from the poverty of the inferior clergy, and the injury

which

which is inflicted by theſe means on religion itſelf.

I wiſh you firſt ſeriouſly to reflect on the diſadvantages which ariſe to government from your non-reſidence. The clergy know full well, that the powers which be are ordained of God; this motive influences them not only to acquieſce under the preſent form of government, but alſo, in great meaſure, to approve its conduct. Never, at leaſt in this century, did government meet with a more ſerious oppoſition, than during the laſt ſix years; an oppoſition which has threatened to devour and lay waſte every thing that is amiable. During the conflict, you have come forward into the world the advocates for Adminiſtration. You have countenanced its meaſures, and ſupported its authority; but your benevolent efforts have been miſplaced. You have been addreſſing yourſelves to thoſe over whom you had no influence; your ſentiments have been diſregarded, and your counſel has been trodden under foot. In the meanwhile, your pariſhes have fallen a prey

to

to craft and to ſeduction, to the inſinuations of malignity and diſappointed ambition. The enemy has been ſowing the ſeeds of civil diſcord in their hearts. Your ignorant flocks have been bewildered by arguments which they could not confute, and have been made converts to they know not what. They have wandered here and there for inſtructors, but have found none in whom they could confide; their paſſions have been rouſed, but their judgments have not been convinced.

Sometimes, however, we have been bleſſed with a different effect. We have beholden a venerable prieſt, the oracle, the guide, the paſtor of his pariſh, inculcating on his flock the duties of civil obedience. His conduct has rivetted the eſteem of his pariſh; his regard for them has ſecured their affections; his converſation has convinced them of his judgment. To him they implicitly have hearkened. He has rendered them peaceful and ſatisfied; cheerful in contributing to the exigencies of the ſtate, and ſtudious in being quiet, and doing their own buſineſs.

Such

Such an one, my friends, (and many ſuch there are amongſt you) deſerves well of his country: him we conſider an ornament to your profeſſion, and a valuable member of ſociety. Would not this be more ſatisfactory to yourſelves, than the formal diſagreeable undertaking of viſiting your pariſhes once, twice, thrice, or four times in the year? It ſtrikes me that it would.

Ill does it become me to preach to your venerable body; but does not the thought ſometimes occur to you of the account you muſt one day render of your ſtewardſhips? It certainly does, and muſt. The duties of the parochial clergy are ſolemn and important; they demand great exertion and circumſpection, and when well performed, claim no ſmall portion of gratitude from the world. How far you intereſt yourſelves in theſe duties, is beſt known to yourſelves; but let me intreat you not to rely implicitly on your curates. They are a deſerving, reſpectable, laborious claſs of men; but they are not the proper ſhepherds. Their ſtipends are trifling,

trifling, and of courſe they look forward to better proviſion. In ſuch a caſe, ſhall we expect them to intereſt themſelves deeply in the welfare of your pariſhes? If we do, we ſhall generally be diſappointed.

It was not the original intention of your eſtabliſhment that the whole duty ſhould devolve on them;—they were only aſſiſtants. During the general reſidence of the clergy, they were intended to alleviate the burden in extenſive pariſhes; or, if wholly to officiate, it was during a *temporary* abſence allowed by the dioceſan. You are well aware that a regular attendance on Sundays is but a very narrow portion of parochial duty. An extenſive pariſh demands daily attention; even ſmall pariſhes exhibit the good effects of a reſident incumbent. Not to mention the ſatisfaction which the pariſhioners experience from having a worthy man amongſt them, and a reliance on him for aſſiſtance in time of need. I will not heſitate to affirm, that the general deportment of a worthy man, his pious example, chearful intercourſe, and

chaſte converſation, tend more to promote the cauſe of virtue and religion in a pariſh, (and conſequently in a nation at large) than all the religious oratory that ever proceeded from the pulpit.

Pardon me, I mean not to depreciate your uſeful inſtructions; I know, and am convinced of their importance. I know that they are advantageous to us all, and that to the poor and to the buſy they are the ſole means of improvement. What then have I ſaid? What, but that I wiſh your admonitions to be inculcated by your preſence? Let it not be urged, that you have calls of a different nature; that you reſide in towns, in cities, or on your paternal acres, and ſerve curacies yourſelves. Let it not be urged, that you have two livings, and therefore that the duties of the one muſt be wholly reſigned to the curate. He, poor man, is obliged to pay too much attention to his little worldly affairs; he denies himſelf the neceſſaries of life, through abſolute compulſion. I am ſpeaking of thoſe numerous dioceſes in which

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the Curate's Bill has not operated.* He has no encouragement to diligence, and finds no reward of merit. He looks (I had almoſt

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* The Biſhop of Rocheſter, when ſpeaking of the Curates'-Bill, at the concluſion of his Charge, uſes theſe admirable words: "It will reflect great diſgrace upon the Parochial Clergy, if it "be *reluctantly* obeyed; and *very great diſgrace upon the Biſhops, "if it be not rigorouſly enforced.*"

Since theſe pages were written, a ſtatement of grievances has been put into my hands. I am at liberty to tranſcribe it; but wiſhing to avoid any thing perſonal, ſhall mention neither the names of the livings, nor that of the weſtern dioceſe in which they are ſituated, I will only obſerve, that ſince the paſſing of the Curates'-Bill a viſitation has been held, but not a ſingle ſyllable tranſpired on the ſubject.

Pariſh	*Value*	*Stipend*	*Surp. Fees*
1ſt.	£.300	£.30 0 0	£.4 10 0
2d.	280	26 0 0	1 10 0
3d.	340	50 0 0	1 15 0
4th,	800†	40 0 0	4 10 0
5th.	450	30 0 0	2 0 0
6th.	500	40 0 0	4 15 0
7th.	300	35 0 0	6 10 0
8th.	320	30 0 0	1 10 0
9th.	200	30 0 0	0 2 6
10th.	300	30 0 0	1 5 0
11th.	340	24 7 6	2 10 0

† Double Duty.

Here we have eleven livings, of the annual value of £.4130. The whole duty is performed for 407l. 17s. 6d. Now it will be aſked by the man of independency, Does the payment of the overplus, 3722l. 2s. 6d. for eaſe, (and I had almoſt ſaid for indolence) aſſiſt the cauſe of Religion? Conſider this well.

ſaid

ſaid with an invidious eye) on thoſe who are ſettled in the world. His circumſtances deny him that bleſſing. They deprive the community of a generous offspring; unleſs, for reaſons which muſt ſtrike you, he has married the daughter of his hoſt. But let us withdraw from this ſcene of wretchedneſs; —yet it is but too common.

The objections which you will oppoſe to my obſervations may involve queſtions too intricate to be diſcuſſed in this haſty exhortation. I am now writing not from my head, but from my heart. During a reſidence of many years in the country, I have been particularly attentive to church affairs. I have found an ill-natured world calumniating the Clergy at large. I have been honoured with the perſonal acquaintance of many, from the Biſhop to the Curate. I have found in them good heads and good hearts. Still, all is not right. The influence of religion is diminiſhing; the volume of ſacred inſtruction has ceaſed to be conſidered the guide of our ways, and the guardian of our virtue. It is conſulted

ſulted on momentous and important occaſions only; ſince the daily incidents of which the greater part of human life is compoſed, diſclaim its authority. In exchange for religion, a ſuperficial ſyſtem of morality, and an ideal ſyſtem of honour, have been ſubſtituted, which in the minds of ſome, from whoſe memories the more early impreſſions of ſcriptural doctrine and phraſeology are not totally effaced, may, for a while, be ſufficient to preſerve the ſemblance of decency.

The various claſſes of Diſſenters are augmenting. Their meeting-houſes are crouded, whilſt our churches are nearly deſerted. All theſe things are againſt us. Theſe are truths too apparent to eſcape the eye of a common obſerver. Miſtake me not; I do not throw the odium on yourſelves alone, though your negligence has been acceſſary to theſe effects. The ſpirit of the times, and the pride of learning, have combined againſt you. Under ſuch circumſtances, you are called on to exert yourſelves with double vigour. The regular and cheerful diſcharge of your duty will bring

bring back many to the pale of the church. This will prove more effectual than every argument.

But, ſhould the world ſtill behold you with indifference; ſhould they ſtill fancy that your preferments are uſed *merely as wordly poſſeſſions*; ſhould they have reaſon to imagine that the duties of your office are a burden on you, their ſentiments will remain unfavourable. Their diſapprobation will become diſguſt. They will continue to uſe every effort to calumniate; nor will they ceaſe, till they ſhall have overthrown your lovely fabrick.

Under a conviction which has alarmed me, and a perſuaſion that you may yet regain every degree of favour and of approbation your warmeſt advocates can wiſh, I have written theſe pages. Let me adjure you, by your deareſt intereſts, by every thing you venerate, to reflect coolly and diſpaſſionately on the parts you are ſuſtaining on the theatre of the world. Aſſiſt the ſinking cauſe of religion. Set about it ere it be too late. Remember the melancholy ſcenes which have

occurred

occurred in a ſiſter kingdom. Even there, it is poſſible, had the clergy rendered themſelves uſeful, whatever convulſions might have befallen the ſtate, the people had ſtill held their perſons and property inviolate.

But the mournful neglect to provide for the curates is of the utmoſt ill conſequence; their poverty has produced very unpleaſant effects. Many a time have I heard the freeholder complaining of that law which obliges him to pay tithe to a non-reſident incumbent, who, whilſt he carries off hundreds from the pariſh, leaves behind him a worthy curate, with forty or fifty pounds per year.

Theſe things muſt be ſet right.

I admit, that there are men, whoſe ſelfiſh intereſts would induce them to grudge the clergy their revenues, even ſhould they exert themſelves to the utmoſt;—with ſuch I have nothing to do. But when the ſerious members of your Church (men whoſe benevolence would cheerfully exert itſelf on your behalf) call on you for attention, you will not, I truſt, refuſe to liſten.

Once

Once more, my reverend friends, reflect ſeriouſly on what you are doing. We know that plans have been propoſed for the abolition of tithes; we know that a conſiderable proportion of the farmers conſider (unjuſtly ſo) the payment of them as a grievance, and will readily embrace the firſt opportunity of liberating themſelves from it. For ſome years I have been attentive to the ſentiments of the world at large on this head, and ſtill more ſo to thoſe of my neighbours. I have converſed with men of diſintereſted principles, men of fortune, men of abilities. I have converſed with the ſenſible part of the farmers themſelves.

I ſhall not heſitate to offer my concluſion. If church preferment were more equally diſtributed; if the incumbent were to reſide in his pariſh, live familiarly with his neighbours, rendering them all the kind offices he would be enabled to render them; or, where this could, *abſolutely*, not be accompliſhed, were to fix a curate in his parſonage-houſe, with a handſome ſalary, a man of humanity,

nity, a gentleman, the complaints which are now increaſing would gradually ſubſide; we ſhould find the Clergy reſpected by thoſe who are now their enemies, revered by their neighbours, and conſidered by us all as an ornamental and beneficial prieſthood.

I remain,

With the utmoſt reſpect,

Your affectionate and ſincere friend,

THE AUTHOR.

February 20th, 1798.

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